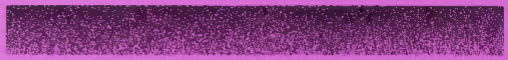
LATINOS AND THE DROPOUT CRISIS

THE COMMUNITY SOLUTION

ASPIRA

The ASPIRA Association, Inc.



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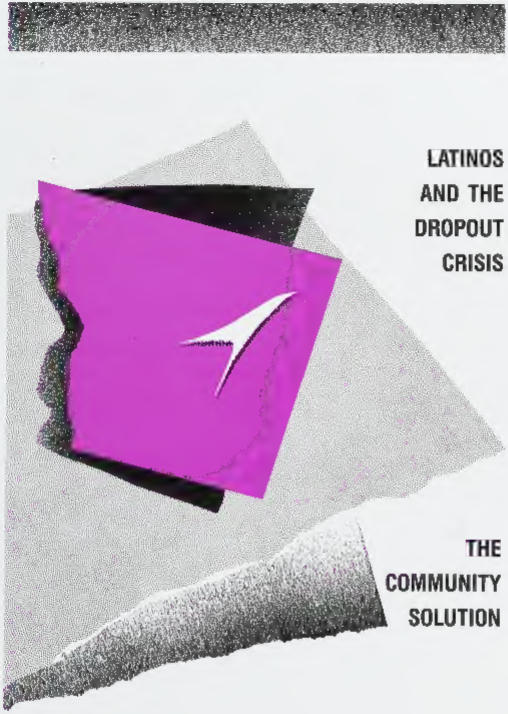

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C O N T E N T S

The Challenge 5

The Latino Response 9
- The ASPIRA Process 10
- Basic Services 12

A Sampler: Associates' Programs 13

National Programs 14
- Hispanic Community Mobilization for Dropout Prevention 14
- Public Policy Leadership Program 15
- National Health Careers Program 16

Research and Advocacy 18
- National and State Interplay 18
- Key ASPIRA Research Studies 20
- An Advocate for Hispanic Youth 23

THE CHALLENGE

It is 1961. The Bronx. A group of Puerto Rican community leaders are discussing the problems that face people who move from "the island" to the mainland. How they settle in New York, looking for the good life and finding, many of them, only frustration and failure. Why is that so often the story? What can be done about it? Poverty is the root cause, they decide; it follows their sisters and brothers from San Juan to New York, and even there, it is passed to the next generation. How can the cycle be broken? Some of the discussants are schoolteachers, others are parents with school-age children. Education, they see, is the key: mastering the language, developing other learning skills, setting and achieving academic goals, and moving into promising careers. So why aren't Puerto Ricans doing better in school? Some do very well, but too many get discouraged. And they quit. At every grade level, the cumulative number of dropouts mounts until, when a class graduates from high school, only a fraction of its initial cohort remains. If education is the key to breaking the poverty cycle, the first essential—the highest priority—is keeping children in school. And how do we do that? We motivate them. We activate the community and all its resources to provide nurture and support for our children. We give them role models and opportunities, and we never stop believing in them.

One participant in that discussion was Herman LaFontaine, then a high school teacher on Manhattan's West Side. Later, as superintendent of the public school system in Hartford, Connecticut, he recalled: "**We kept thinking of aspiring to higher education, and from that was born ASPIRA.**"

At a few high schools in the Bronx and Brooklyn, ASPIRA clubs were established, bringing Puerto Rican students and adults together in a common endeavor: Building a better future by placing the proper value on education and using it to break the poverty cycle.

During the intervening decades, ASPIRA has had considerable success. It has grown and spread to several cities in four other states and Puerto Rico. In 1968, it became the first national association devoted exclusively to the development of future Latino leaders. Today its support of education and its dropout prevention efforts reach all Hispanic groups, serving not only Puerto Ricans, but Americans of Mexican, Cuban, and Central and South American backgrounds.

During these years, too, the numbers of Hispanic citizens have risen dramatically, and their ranks continue to grow at a dizzying pace. But one thing has not changed: High dropout rates continue to plague the Latino community, and now the challenge extends from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, from Miami to Los Angeles.

While the nation's annual high school dropout rate declined from 6.6 to 4.4 percent from 1978 to 1988, Hispanic Americans did not share in that improvement. Their annual dropout rate has remained relatively stable, between 9 and 11 percent, for some 15 years. U.S. Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos, announcing the creation of his Task Force on Hispanic Education early in 1990, summed up the situation succinctly:

> Hispanic Americans, our fastest growing minority, are bearing an unequal share of the nation's education deficit. One out of every 10 Hispanic students drops out of high school each year....

Janice Petrovich, national executive director of the ASPIRA Association, Inc., and director of its Institute for Policy Research, notes that nationwide the rapid growth of the Latino population portends a striking difference in the American work force of tomorrow:

> The Latino population in this country is growing at five times the rate of the rest of the population. Last year, about 39 percent of all Hispanic Americans were under 20 years of age. What's more, all minority groups combined are growing faster than the majority population, and their increasing numbers make it clear that minority young people are quickly becoming the primary source of supply for the American labor market.

In the last decade, while black and white dropout rates declined, Hispanic rates were stable. About 1 in 10 Latino students dropped out each year.

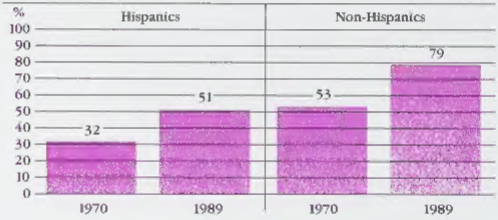
Source: *The Condition of Education 1990*, National Center for Education Statistics (June 1990).

This is happening, Petrovich notes, just as global economic competition intensifies and the emerging "information age" demands more highly skilled and sophisticated workers. Thus, the under-educated not only face deprivation in their own lives but pose a real danger to the general economy—and among sizable population groups, Latinos are the least educated. She continues:

> The low level of Latinos' educational attainment is the single most important barrier to their success in the work place. In 1989, only 51 percent of the Hispanic adults aged 25 or older in this country had completed high school, compared to 79 percent of their non-Hispanic peers. At the same time, only 10 percent of Hispanics in that age group had completed four or more years of college, compared to 21 percent of non-Hispanics.

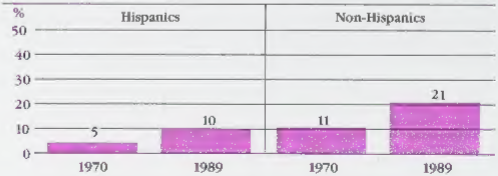
Portion of U.S. Population Completing Four or More Years of High School*

25 Years and Older



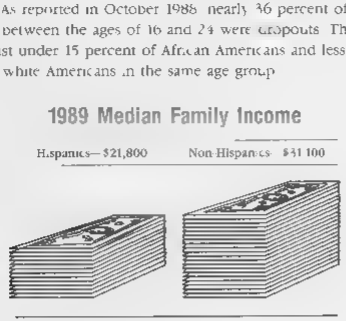
Portion of U.S. Population Completing Four or More Years of College*

25 Years and Older



*Source: *The Hispanic Population in the United States: March 1989*, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census (June 1990).

Figures from the National Center for Education Statistics underscore the depth and breadth of the dropout problem among Hispanics. As reported in October 1988, nearly 36 percent of Hispanic Americans between the ages of 16 and 24 were dropouts. This compared to just under 15 percent of African Americans and less than 13 percent of white Americans in the same age group.



Source: *The Hispanic Population in the United States: March 1989*
U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census (June 1990)

For 30 years, ASPIRA has focused on encouraging Latino youths to stay in school, develop leadership skills, establish and reach academic goals, plan and prepare for careers, and ultimately give back to the Hispanic community some of what they have received from it. Examples of its success abound, all rooted in the concept of a unified and determined Latino community aspiring to a better life.

The Latino Response

Among Latinos, the sense of community is strong. Some say this strength flows naturally from the traditional Latino notion of family. From its inception, ASPIRA has used the Hispanic community's own cultural, ethnic, and linguistic affinities to mold it into an effective instrument of advancement within the larger society. One way to understand this approach is to look at ASPIRA's *modus operandi*.

Having begun at the local level as an effort to work with school children through clubs at a few New York high schools, it remains to this day a grassroots organization. Clubs still function as the basic operating units, maintaining strong links to the schools and to the appropriate ASPIRA Associate, or state affiliate. Each affiliate is an autonomous not for profit corporation with its own board of directors and its own staff, budget, activities, and services.

In support of the ASPIRA network, the National Office conducts research and publishes the results, coordinates national programs, staff training, and other activities that involve multiple Associates, collaborates with other national organizations that have similar concerns, provides information on Hispanic needs to federal legislative bodies and executive agencies, and works to ensure that ASPIRA's sound and measured expansion continues.

The relationship between the National Office and the Associates is synergistic. There are many ties. The National Board of Directors includes student representatives and board members from all the Associates; the major national programs build upon parallel state and local activities; state and national programs alike depend upon linkages to the broader Latino community, to educational institutions, to parents. In short, ASPIRA's many components are united by that strong Hispanic sense of community — and by their common purpose.

The ASPIRA Process

Over the years, ASPIRA has developed a highly successful model for intervention in the education and development of Hispanic youth. Called the ASPIRA Process, the model consciously accentuates the positive, putting the stress on developing the potential of Latino students. **Aspirantes**, rather than overcoming their deficits.

Driven by the perception that the lives of Latinos — and the prospects of their children — must be changed, the ASPIRA Process is complex. Still, it can be best described by three simple words: Awareness, analysis, and action. Janice Petrovich explains:

- "Awareness stands, first of all, for recognizing the community's problems and needs and sharing that recognition with others.
- "Analysis signifies the necessity for gathering and analyzing data in order to identify factors causing the problems, determine the breadth and depth of their effects, establish priorities, and develop and test solutions.
- "Action means planning and initiating programs, providing services and advocating change."

Thirty-nine percent of all Hispanics in the United States are under 20 years of age, compared to 28% of non-Hispanics.

Source: The Hispanic Population in the United States, March 1985, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, June 1986.

But awareness, analysis, and action are not separate, sequential steps. They feed on each other. For example, when research yields potential solutions, it leads to plans for action, and it also supplies the means of spreading awareness to more and greater audiences. Similarly, action programs often lead to awareness of additional problems that call for further analysis. In a way, the ASPIRA Process is like an ecosystem.

Because community concern and research have repeatedly singled out reducing the high school dropout rate as Latinos' #1 priority, it offers the best example of the Process at work. In this case, awareness led to analysis and to action, both of which increased awareness, spawning new research and different efforts in the field.

Types of action taken by ASPIRA in order to reduce Latino dropout rates include:

Organizing Latino students, educators, parents, and community leaders—at school, city, state, and national levels—to work together for shared goals;

Establishing ongoing programs and services for students and dropouts;

Encouraging regular interaction between different elements of the Latino community, bridging generations and geography;

Advocating educational and social change by calling new information to the attention of agencies and organizations with decision-making authority.

Keeping the individual student in school is the prime goal, and ASPIRA knows that the student must have a sense of self-worth, a feeling that success is possible, before he or she will make that choice. That is why ASPIRA tries above all to motivate the students, to make them aware of their own potential. The organization helps them gain confidence and achieve success in education through programs that:

Develop their academic and leadership skills;

Counsel them in sound educational and career decision-making techniques; and

Help shape them into responsible, contributing members of the community.

There is considerable evidence that the ASPIRA Process works, that it does indeed provide Latino students with the emotional, intellectual, and practical resources they need to remain and succeed in school. Here are just a few samples of that evidence:

In its first 27 years, ASPIRA provided counseling to about 165,000 students, and of those who were eligible, 70 percent enrolled in postsecondary institutions.

A research study conducted by ASPIRA of Illinois indicates that Chicago students served by the organization are twice as likely to remain in high school as their peers in an unserved control group.

Extraordinarily high rates of high school retention have been registered by Aspirantes at all ASPIRA sites.

In 1988, 77 percent of the high school seniors served by ASPIRA of Florida enrolled in postsecondary institutions, in New Jersey the figure was 54 percent, and in Puerto Rico, fully 90 percent.

Currently through its National Office and six Associates ASPIRA serves approximately 13,000 young Latinos and reaches out to more than 5,000 parents—each year.

Basic Services

I'm sold on the effectiveness of the ASPIRA clubs for producing leaders for our community.

Nelson Diaz
Aspirante from New York and Pennsylvania's first Hispanic Judge

ASPIRA's services are grounded in clubs composed of Hispanic students. Each Associate office works closely with a number of high schools and some middle schools, and at each school a club is the focal point of ASPIRA activity. The impetus for organizing a club often comes from the students themselves, but sometimes Associate staff take the initiative. Because some Latino students do not have access to a club at school, the Associate operates home-based clubs in ASPIRA facilities.

Through their clubs, Aspirantes are given opportunities to develop leadership and academic skills in workshops, seminars, and discussion groups. They hear from guests in civic policy-making positions and meet Hispanic role models from state and local circles. They also participate in national ASPIRA programs.

In the clubs, Aspirantes learn to work together, provide peer support for one another, and strive for group rather than individual goals. The clubs also provide the practical opportunity to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizens in an open, democratic society. The Aspirantes conduct elections and participate in them both as candidates and as voters; they learn and use parliamentary procedures; they debate issues, set priorities, and decide questions. The clubs are, in a very real sense, societies in miniature.

Furthermore, each ASPIRA Associate links all of its clubs in a federation. The president and one other representative of each of these federations usually serve as members of the Associate's Board of Directors. In turn, the federation president often holds a student representative's position on the National Board of Directors.

Every ASPIRA Associate has a paid staff that includes a number of counselors who specialize in advising Aspirantes relative to academic and career planning. These counselors, mostly Hispanics with college degrees, are specially trained by ASPIRA. Basic training is supplied by the Associate offices, and the National Office provides additional training as appropriate for its programs and projects.

A Sampler: Associates' Programs

Each of ASPIRA's Associates is engaged in a variety of programs, projects, and research efforts on a continuing basis. The chart below offers a quick glance at a fraction of many current activities for each office.

Office	Program
ASPIRA of Florida, Inc.	Project GAIN offers comprehensive services to South Florida youths who are members of gangs in order to keep them in school, interest them in education, and give them positive cultural experiences. Services include counseling, tutoring, leadership training, job placement.
ASPIRA, Inc., of Illinois	The ASPIRA of Illinois Alternative High School provides positive educational experiences—and a second chance to earn a diploma—for up to 60 dropouts at a time. Fully accredited, the classroom program features a standard curriculum with special emphasis on basic skills and social, personal, and career goals.
ASPIRA, Inc., of New Jersey	In collaboration with AT&T, ASPIRA provides summer internships for about 25 Aspirantes each year. Each intern is assigned a mentor and a supervisor at one of four AT&T sites for 10 hours a week. Usually, interns work on projects that can be completed and evaluated during the eight-week internship.
ASPIRA of New York, Inc.	Project AWARE aims at reducing the dropout rate at Morris High School, South Bronx, by addressing personal, family, academic, and community factors that impact on school retention. Counseling, family assistance, and basic skills training are offered.
ASPIRA, Inc. of Pennsylvania	The Abriendo Caminos Program offers dropouts job skills training, preparation for the high school equivalency exam, and job or college placement services. It works with 300 dropouts in small classroom settings each year.
ASPIRA, Inc. de Puerto Rico	ASPIRA conducts Head Start programs for preschool children and their parents in Río Piedras and other areas on the island. Additionally, parents participate in the ASPIRA Literacy Program designed to sharpen their reading and writing skills.

National Programs

...ASPIRA does phenomenal work. With meager resources, it does so much.

Wilfredo Gonzalez
Staff Director
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

While ASPIRA's National Office performs several distinct functions providing liaison with the federal government and professional organizations running the ASPIRA Institute for Policy Research disseminating information raising funds and lending to the Association's growth and governance much of its time and effort is devoted to refining extending or supplementing the activities of the Associates and their student clubs

One outgrowth of ASPIRA's long-term collaboration with Educational Testing Service (ETS) offers a clear illustration of the synergy of national and local operations ETS and the National Office entered their agreement in order to collaborate on products and services that would enhance their separate efforts to help assure educational equity and access for Latino students When ASPIRA Associates voiced a need for training in college admissions counseling the National Office and ETS created an intensive program for the 250 counselors from all ASPIRA sites so they would be able to provide informed and effective guidance to Aspirantes Similar accommodation to the needs of Associates and Aspirantes characterizes the major programs coordinated by the National Office as the following descriptions indicate

Hispanic Community Mobilization for Dropout Prevention

Funded by a grant to the ASPIRA Institute for Policy Research from the U S Department of Education this project is developing dropout prevention models in nine major urban areas intended to demonstrate different ways Hispanic communities can act to stem the dropout tide the programs vary greatly from site to site

Administered by the National Office the project embraces efforts by the Associates in six cities—Camden, New Jersey Carolina, Puerto Rico Chicago Miami New York and Philadelphia and by these other agencies

- In Milwaukee the United Community Center
- In San Antonio the Intercultural Development Research Association and
- In the nation's capital the Calvary Multicultural Learning Center

Elena Pell National Office director of this project says that each participating organization shaped its own approach to parental and community involvement responding to an assessment of local priorities While the efforts are diverse and the total picture is complex she says the agencies all serve large Hispanic populations and share these goals and supporting activities

- To heighten awareness of the Latino dropout rate among parents and others in the Hispanic community and motivate them to become involved in combating it by
  - collecting relevant data regarding the targeted urban areas,
  - disseminating the results of research into strategies for curbing dropouts,
  - training staff of community organizations, and
  - forging cooperative arrangements among organizations that deal with Latino youth and families.
- To assist parents and communities in implementing their chosen strategies by
  - using the ASPIRA Process to promote educational achievement among young Latinos, and
  - developing useful materials in both Spanish and English.

As the agencies work toward these goals in the field, the National Office provides necessary administrative and technical assistance, materials development, and coordination.

Overall, Pell says, the project addresses "every dimension of parental involvement in education — the rights of parents and children, strengthening the family, home study, voluntarism, conflict negotiation, discipline at home and in the school, leadership development, advocacy. Activities frequently include home visits by project staff and volunteers, parent orientation to schools, individual and group efforts at advocacy, counseling, leadership training, parent conferences, and small workshops.

As part of its role, the National Office published *Facing the Facts: Hispanic Dropouts in Ten Urban Communities*, a statistical summary of Latino dropout rates in the target cities. It also issued a two-volume publication, *Making the Most of Your Child's Education*, which Pell says is a complete workshop curriculum for Hispanic parents. Both the first volume, *A Guide for Parents*, and the second, *More Topics for Parents*, feature brief, illustrated chapters in Spanish and English on issues related to parental involvement in education and school reform.

> "What ASPIRA is doing should be replicated around the country."
>
> Raúl Yzaguirre
> Director, Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs
> U.S. Department of Education

Public Policy Leadership Program

With support from the Ford Foundation, the ASPIRA Public Policy Leadership Program is a three-pronged, year-round effort to prepare promising young Latinos to enter the ranks of decision makers. Its

national coordinator, Arcadio Torres-Arroyo, lists these major components

A 15-week *Leadership Seminar* with at least 15 participants at each of the six Associates in the fall and winter;

Community Service Internships at the state or local level for 15 Aspirantes from each Associate in the spring; and

Four- to six-week *National Internships* in Washington for about 18 outstanding Community Service Interns in the summer

Participants in the Leadership Seminars are mostly high school seniors and juniors. Torres-Arroyo says. An interested Aspirante must submit an application and letters of recommendation from teachers counselors, or community leaders. For the 90 who are accepted, the rewards are tangible. They learn to plan research projects, to debate issues, to speak effectively in public. They meet members of a variety of state and local policy making bodies and hear their views on current affairs.

Springtime interns also go through a rigorous application and selection process. Then they work in the offices of state or local leaders who act as their mentors. An intern might be assigned to work with the mayor, a school board member, or a city councilwoman, with the district attorney or the president of the local chamber of commerce. In the process, the interns learn valuable lessons about the problems facing state and local government and about how public officials and agencies function.

> The caliber of individuals ASPIRA attracts to the Emerging Leadership program is a testimony to the organization's good work.
>
> Christina Cuevas
> Program Officer
> The Ford Foundation

For the prized National Internships, Torres-Arroyo says, competition is fierce. These summer assignments mean a month or more in the nation's capital, earning a stipend and working with key policy makers. Aspirantes submit applications to the appropriate Associate, where they are rated and forwarded to a national selection committee. In 1990 mentors for the 18 interns included members of both houses of Congress, the surgeon general, directors of various federal agencies, and a member of the White House staff.

Without exception, Torres-Arroyo reports, "our interns say that this experience is invaluable. They leave so inspired they could practically fly home without an airplane."

National Health Careers Program

In 1970, seed money from the Kellogg Foundation enabled ASPIRA of New York to introduce a program aimed at attracting capable young Latinos into the medical, dental, and allied health fields.

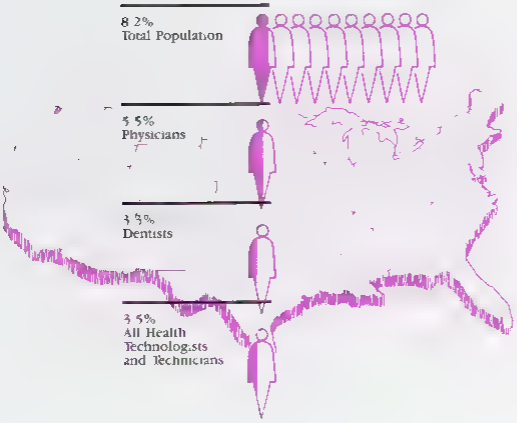
A year later, with funding from the National Urban Coalition, ASPIRA expanded the program to its offices in Illinois, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Puerto Rico. Today, supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the U.S. Public Health Services Health Careers Opportunity Program, the program serves about one thousand Aspirantes each year.

Why health careers? Once again, the need is spelled out in depressing statistics, this time from the U.S. Department of Labor. Hispanics make up 8.2 percent of the U.S. population but only 5.5 per cent of the medical doctors, 3.3 percent of the dentists, 2 percent of the registered nurses, 3.5 percent of the health technicians, and 5.3 percent of the health administrators and nutritionists. According to Hilda Crespo, who coordinates the program for the National Office, the principal objectives are to

- Increase the numbers of Hispanic and other minority youths entering and graduating from medical and other health professions schools, as well as programs in allied health fields, and
- Encourage these same young people, after completing their education, to return to their communities and practice.

> The ASPIRA [illegible] ops were wonderful. They gave me a lot of support and always told me "yes, you can be a doctor."
>
> [illegible] Maria Caraballo, M.D.
> Aspirante from Philadelphia

Hispanics as Share of U.S. Population



To accomplish these ends, the Associates offer various activities and services to minority high school and college students. Counseling is tailored to one level or the other. ASPIRA tries to persuade high school students to pursue higher education, and college students to seek professional degrees or certificates in the health fields. ASPIRA also offers academic enrichment activities—workshops on study skills, time management, test preparation, note taking, use of libraries and reference works—and admissions assistance. Crespo says:

> We work directly with schools and colleges and universities, she says—offering career-centered academic counseling—primarily through workshops on financial aid, study skills, and the applications process. We also offer conferences on the health professions, enabling students to meet Hispanic role models in the health fields, as well as representatives from professional schools and programs.

Associates conduct these and other activities through their own ASPIRA Health Careers Clubs. Over several years, on average, 70 percent of ASPIRA's applicants have been admitted to medical, dental, and other health professions schools. After admission, students have access to continuing support from ASPIRA in the form of services designed to improve academic performance (and raise the schools' retention rates).

Throughout this program, as in all ASPIRA efforts, there is heavy reliance on mature members of the Hispanic community—in this case, health field practitioners—and strong emphasis on parental involvement. In fact, special workshops are offered to acquaint parents with the stringent academic requirements of all health careers so students who pursue them will have the home support they need.

The number of Hispanics in the United States climbed by 45% from 1977 to 1987. The number of baccalaureate degrees awarded to Hispanics also increased 53%.

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, June 1990; National Center for Education Statistics (June 1990).

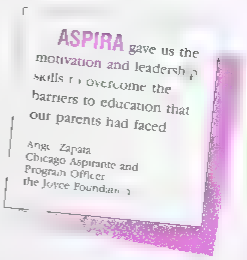
Research and Advocacy

Research plays a central role in ASPIRA's work. The organization attaches great significance to the pursuit of knowledge about Latinos' educational problems and potential. A vivid example is provided by a broad-based study of Hispanic high school dropouts that yielded two landmark publications: *The ASPIRA Five Cities High School Dropout Study: Focus on Parents* and *The ASPIRA Five Cities High School Dropout Study: Characteristics of Hispanic High School Students*.

We base all of our action programs on solid research, Janice Petrovich says. Of course, we rely on funding from outside sources, so our own research projects are somewhat sporadic. But we also keep tabs on research conducted by others—by universities, government agencies, and other organizations that are concerned with minority

groups. Still, through the years, ASPIRA has done a number of key studies of its own, at both national and state levels.

In fact," she continues, "ASPIRA has often been the first to identify critical factors affecting the education of Puerto Rican and other Latino youth, -the extremely high dropout rates in urban areas such as Chicago, New York City, and Philadelphia; the negative effects of retaining Latino students in grade; the important differences between Latino youths of different ethnic backgrounds.


ASPIRA gave us the motivation and leadership skills to overcome the barriers to education that our parents had faced
Angie Zapata
Chicago Aspirante and Program Officer
the Joyce Foundation

National and State Interplay

Some ASPIRA studies are integral parts of specific projects. For example, Project ACCESS in Chicago, an effort funded by the Coca Cola Company, had a built-in research component providing periodic progress reports.

Project ACCESS also exemplifies the distinct but intertwined roles of the national and state offices. While the Associates usually secure their own funding for projects and for research studies, as the Illinois office did for Project ACCESS, that is not always the case. For some studies, the Institute secures the funding. In such cases, the National Office may ask the Associates to collect data in their states—or it may subcontract with one or more Associates to perform studies or portions of a study.

Like ASPIRA itself, the research function began in New York and went national in 1968. Through the years, names and organizational structure may have changed, but research has remained the bedrock of ASPIRAs endeavors. Petrovich says that, in 1985, with the establishment of the ASPIRA Institute for Policy Research, the National Office underscored its dedication to taking an enlightened, fact-based approach to the problems facing the nation's several Hispanic populations. Not only is the Institute symbolically significant, she says, but it represents the greater emphasis that must be placed on disseminating research results and project reports in the critical times ahead.

Key ASPIRA Research Studies

Year	Conducted by	Title/description
1990	ASPIRA, Inc., of Illinois	**Project ACCESS Final Report** An analysis of data gathered in connection with a four-year pilot program in school retention sponsored by the Coca-Cola USA Education Fund. The project involved 107 Latino students, parents, teachers, and community leaders in a concerted attempt to build academic success and avert dropouts. Research showed students in the control group were two times as likely to drop out as were Project ACCESS participants.
1989	Ricardo Fernandez for the ASPIRA Institute for Policy Research	**Hispanic Dropouts in Five Cities: The Role of Communities, Institutions, and Student Characteristics** This two-year study conducted in the Chicago, Miami-Newark, Milwaukee, and San Antonio metropolitan areas documented reasons for high Hispanic dropout rates, developed guidelines for establishing dropout prevention policies, and resulted in a series of practical publications. Importantly, it gathered data not only for all Hispanics but for ethnic subgroups.
1987	Janice Petrovich for ASPIRA Institute for Policy Research	**Northeast Hispanic Needs** With funding from the NYNEX Foundation, ASPIRA convened 40 Hispanic leaders from across the Northeast to study their communities' social needs, then did a direct mail survey of 250 plus other leaders in the region, drawing a 59% response rate. Results were compiled and analyzed in a two-volume report, *Northeast Hispanic Needs: A Guide for Action*. Identified as the #1 need across the region: "Increase Hispanic school attendance and reduce dropout rates."

Key ASPIRA Research Studies

Year	Conducted by	Title/description
1987	Manuel Gutierrez, Braulio Montalvo, Kay Armstrong, David Webb, Gary Pickens for ASPIRA, Inc., of Pennsylvania	Premarital Sexual Relations and Pregnancy among Puerto Rican Youths Study showed that dropping out among Latino girls was largely attributable to pregnancy; that sexually active girls 17 and younger were more likely to become pregnant than those who received some sex education; age 18 or older and that 28% of the sample experienced premarital pregnancies, compared with national rates of 17% for whites and 43% for blacks
1984	Manuel Gutierrez & Braulio Montalvo for ASPIRA, Inc., of Pennsylvania	Dropping Out and Delinquency among Puerto Rican Youths: A Longitudinal Study Following 505 Philadelphia Puerto Ricans and their guardians from grade 10 through grade 12, the researchers found that 54.7% had dropped out by their senior year; delinquency was a causal factor among male dropouts, and both delinquency and dropping out stemmed from peer pressure in the absence of balancing family and school influences
1984	Charles L. Kyle for ASPIRA, Inc., of Illinois	The ASPIRA Chicago Drop-out Study Kyle reported that 70% of the students who entered two predominantly Hispanic public high schools in Chicago in 1979 and not graduate and that official school statistics were incorrectly calculated and masked the true dropout rate. He also found that gangs were a powerful presence in the schools although teachers were generally ignorant of that fact

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1984	ASPIRA, Inc., de Puerto Rico	La Politica Educativa para el Mejoramiento del Desertor Escolar Programas y Proyecciones With a dropout rate of 55% reported by the island's Department of Public Instruction, ASPIRA's study focused on the importance of education and the relationship of high dropout and unemployment rates, and examined the effectiveness of existing laws, government efforts, and other programs. The report concludes with a number of recommendations.
1983	Richard Calitri for ASPIRA of New York, Inc.	Racial and Ethnic High School Dropout Rates in New York City The city's high school dropout rates in 1980-81 were estimated at 80% for Hispanics, 72% for blacks, and 50% for whites, but the Board of Education underreported them by 2%. For Hispanics, the rates were 43.3% of ninth graders, 30.0% of tenth graders, 39.[illegible]% of eleventh graders, 21.0% of twelfth graders, worse than 20 years earlier.
1976	Jose Hernandez for ASPIRA of America, Inc. (now The ASPIRA Association, Inc.)	Socio-Factors in Educational Attainment among Puerto Ricans in U.S. Metropolitan Areas, 1970 Hernández used census data to analyze Puerto Rican dropout rates in 11 metropolitan areas. Overall, he found that 50% dropped out of high school, and 40% graduated. On a delayed basis, however, another 25% graduated. Problems leading to delays and dropouts were traced to negative experiences in elementary grades, and holding youngsters back was found to be a major contributor to dropping out.

Key ASPIRA Research Studies

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1968	Richard Margolis for ASPIRA of America, Inc.	The Losers: A Report on Puerto Ricans and the Public Schools Margolis interviewed children, parents, teachers, and administrators at 16 schools in seven cities and found that Puerto Rican students were often "put back" and/or assigned to nonacademic courses; most principals could count on the fingers of one hand the Puerto Rican students going on to college; white teachers usually held condescending views of Puerto Rican students, and efforts to change their views were largely ineffective.

Note: A complete list of ASPIRA research reports and other publications is available on request from the National Office.

An Advocate for Hispanic Youth

Advocacy is a constant function of all ASPIRA offices. In New York City, for example, a suit brought against the Board of Education on behalf of ASPIRA of New York resulted in a 1974 consent decree ordering the schools to provide bilingual education programs. In Illinois, the Associate assisted Latino parents in winning election to school councils and provided support for them in subsequent efforts to restructure Chicago's public schools. Similarly, in Dade County (Miami), ASPIRA of Florida helped Latino parents become active—and effective—in public school affairs.

Since the Institute for Policy Research was created, the National Office has expanded its own role as an advocate of improved education for Hispanic and other minority young people. Publishing, disseminating, and testifying before congressional committees regarding the results of relevant research—all of these attest to the vigor of the organization's effort.

So, too, does the constant interaction of ASPIRA staff with members of Congress, federal agency officials, and other policymakers

In the 1980s, the Hispanic population of the US grew at five times the rate of the non-Hispanic population, climbing from 14.5 million to 20.1 million, 8.2% of the total population.

Source: *The Hispanic Population in the United States: March 1989*, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census (June 1990).

who need to be fully informed about Latino educational achievement and its grim implications for the society and the economy.

Petrovich points out that ASPIRA also works closely with many other national organizations concerned with Hispanics and/or education, and has formed partnerships with some of them. The collaboration with Educational Testing Service is one example, and ASPIRA also has links with a number of other organizations and institutions. "Our coalition work with other groups toward specific ends is important," she says. "So is our membership on various commissions, task forces, and committees dealing with Latino advancement."

All of these national activities are paralleled on the local level by state office efforts, Petrovich adds. "However active we are in Washington, we can never forget that our cause is the individual Latino student in the neighborhood school. She or he is, after all, the Aspirante, the one this is all about."

That is reason enough for ASPIRA to plan its own growth, to expand into new cities and states, but the lure is balanced by recognition that growth must be sound, and the grassroots tradition must be maintained.

"We will not move into a community and attempt to organize there," Petrovich says. "The people of the community have to develop an ASPIRA. They will *be* ASPIRA. They will need community support, they will need to raise funds, they will need to give of their time. Evidence of their capability to sustain their own organization is a requirement for becoming an ASPIRA Associate.

"This process may slow our growth, but the truth is we don't want to create an Associate that doesn't have staying power. That would be a waste of effort and resources, and it would shatter the expectations of that particular community. We can't afford such waste."

Petrovich is confident of the ultimate outcome. "ASPIRA," she says, "has demonstrated that Latinos can solve their problems through united community effort. That means the organization will grow—and reach its goals. To me, ASPIRA *means* success."

> Through...counseling and guidance, ASPIRA provides the tools for a brighter tomorrow.
>
> Nidia Dávila-Colón
> New Jersey Aspirante, elected freeholder of Jersey City

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